

UNCLASSIFIED

Current Class: [REDACTED]
Current Handling: [REDACTED]
Document Number: 1976BUENOS04443

7/7/76

Page: 1

Channel: n/a

Case Number: 200000044

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PAGE 01 BUENOS 04443 072109Z

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 /026 W

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FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6268

[REDACTED] BUENOS AIRES 4443

ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)
U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS
Margaret P. Grafeld, Director
(☒) Release () Excise () Deny
Exemption(s): _____

DECLASSIFIED

E.O. 11652: XGDS-2

TAGS: ASEC, PINT, PINS, SHUM, AR

SUBJECT: KILLING OF CATHOLIC PRIESTS AND NUNS ALLEGED TO BE
ACTION OF GOA SECURITY FORCES

Declassify: () In Part (☒) In Full
() Classify as _____ () Extend as _____ () Downgrade to _____
Date _____ Declassify on _____ Reason _____

REF: (A) BUENOS AIRES 4272, (B) BUENOS AIRES 4374

1. THE ASSASSINATION IN BUENOS AIRES OF THREE ARGENTINE CITIZEN CATHOLIC PRIESTS OF THE IRISH PALLOTINE ORDER AND TWO YOUNG SEMINARIANS ON JULY 4 WAS REPORTED IN THE LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL MEDIA. A COMMUNIQUE ISSUED BY THE ARMY BLAMED THE KILLINGS OF THE CHURCHMEN ON "SUBVERSIVE" (I.E. LEFTIST EXTREMIST) ELEMENTS. THE ARGENTINE PRESS HAS BEEN CAREFUL IN ITS HANDLING OF THE INCIDENT, WHICH HAS SHOCKED PUBLIC OPINION, BUT HAS HINTED AT EVIDENCE THAT RIGHTIST COUNTER-TERRORIST ELEMENTS MIGHT HAVE COMMITTED THE MURDERS.

2. WE HAVE BEEN INFORMED BY OFFICER ATTACHED TO PRESIDENTIAL STAFF, ON HIGHEST DEGREE OF CONFIDENTIALITY, THAT FIVE CHURCHMEN PLUS THREE NUNS WERE EXECUTED BY MEMBERS OF ARMY INTELLIGENCE SERVICE (SIE). ACCORDING TO SOURCE, SIE DETERMINED THAT MARIO FIRMENICH, SENIOR MONTENERO LEADER, WHO WAS HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR PLANNING ASSASSINATION IN 1970 OF PRES. ARAMBURU AND RECENT BOMBING OF FEDERAL POLICE HEADQUARTERS (REFTEL B) AND OTHER TERRORIST ACTS, WAS HIDING IN ST. PATRICK'S CHURCH IN BELGRANO AREA OF BUENOS AIRES. FERMENICH WAS ALLEGED TO BE UNDER PROTECTION OF CLERGY. SIE WENT TO CHURCH

Current Class: [REDACTED]

Page: 1

UNCLASSIFIED

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Current Class: [REDACTED]
Current Handling: [REDACTED]
Document Number: 1976BUENOS04443

Page: 2

Channel: n/a

Case Number: 200000044

[REDACTED]
PAGE 02 BUENOS 04443 072109Z

TO CAPTURE FERMENICH BUT FOUND THAT HE HAD LEFT. SIE OFFICERS EXECUTED FIVE CHURCHMEN FOUND THERE, AND ON FOLLOWING DAY, JULY 5, KILLED THREE NUNS ALLEGED TO HAVE ASSISTED FERMANICH TO ESCAPE. CARDINAL ARAMBURU, PRIMATE OF ARGENTINA, COMMENTED TO AMBASSADOR AT INDEPENDENCE DAY RECEPTION JULY 5 THAT "CHURCH MUST PAY ITS TOLL."

3. COMMENT: ANOTHER CONFIDENTIAL REPORT IS CIRCULATING THAT KILLINGS OF CLERGY WERE WORK OF FEDERAL POLICE OFFICERS RATHER THAN ARMY. WE ARE UNABLE TO CONFIRM EITHER REPORT. HOWEVER, WE ACCEPT THE PROBABILITY THAT KILLINGS WERE ACTION OF SOME ELEMENT OF THE GOA SECURITY FORCES. WE ALSO DO NOT FIND IT IMPLAUSIBLE THAT CHURCHMEN COULD HAVE BEEN ASSISTING AN EXTREMIST TO EVADE CAPTURE. IF SECURITY FORCES CONVINCED THAT MONTONERO LEADER HAD INDEED BEEN ASSISTED BY CLERGY, IT IS LIKELY IN PRESENT TENSE ATMOSPHERE THT THIS WOULD HAVE BEEN SUFFICIENT PROVOCATION TO SECURITY FORCES TO INDUCE THEM TO TAKE DRASTIC STEP OF MASS EXECUTION OF PRIESTS AND NUNS.

4. IT IS QUITE POSSIBLE THAT THIS ACTION COULD HAVE BEEN CARRIED OUT BY LOWER LEVEL MEMBERS OF THE SECURITY FORCES WITHOUT ORDERS FROM THEIR SUPERIORS. SECURITY FORCES, FOLLOWING BOMBING OF POLICE HEAD-QUARTERS WHICH HAS TO DATE TAKEN TOLL OF 20 DEAD AND 66 INJURED, WERE AND ARE TAKING MORE EXTENSIVE AND EXTREME MEASURES IN THEIR EFFORTS TO CAPTURE THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR BOMBING.

5. WE EXPECT THAT REGARDLESS OF ACTUAL FACTS OF MATTER, DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC OPINION WILL PROBABLY ATTRIBUTE KILLINGS OF CLERGY TO GOA. LEVEL OF VIOLENCE FROM BOTH SIDES HAS ESCALATED SIGNIFICANTLY IN RECENT DAYS. WE WILL BE REPORTING ON OVERALL DEVELOPMENTS IN SECURITY AREA IN SEPTTEL.
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Current Class: [REDACTED]

Page: 2

UNCLASSIFIED